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ABSTRACT

Literature can be used in an elementary school curriculum to provide sound moral models for children. Through the exploration of moral problems and the adoption of the perspectives of others, children may begin to develop and refine their own morality. A male and a female morality may be identified in literature. The male morality--based on the ability to distance oneself for objectivity--results in moral imperatives, judgment, rights, rules, and hierarchies of values, while the female perspective of morality--grounded in networks of relationships--tends to result in a moral concern for the pain and suffering of others and in a recognition of one's responsibility to others. Although male morality is not necessarily a characteristic of the male sex and female morality is not necessarily a characteristic of the female sex, in American society they do tend to be sex-related. Some children's books that illustrate this female morality are "Charlotte's Web" by E. B. White, "The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses" by Paul Goble, and Mildred Taylor's "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry." In using literature to foster moral development in the classroom, teachers can take a number of steps, including (1) using books that offer an alternative to the usual male perspective on morality; (2) helping children compare alternative endings to certain traditional tales; (3) having children act on their reading by trying out possible alternative ways of interpreting a book, scene, situation, or character; and (4) sharing with children real-life role models who manifest in their lives a comprehensive morality. A three-page bibliography is included. (DF)

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Reading and Moral Development: From a Feminine Perspective

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"By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that" (White, 1952, p. 164). So says Charlotte A. Cavatica, spider extraordinary, as she attempts to explain to Wilbur the pig why she had helped him. Lifting up one's life a little by lifting up the lives of others is not only a moral affirmation but also an artistic affirmation. "Real" art, according to Tolstoy, serves a moral Purpose: it not only delights, but also instructs and improves. "The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbor . . . the customary feeling and instinct of all men." "Real" art should "cause violence to be set aside" (Tolstoy, 1969, pp. 286-88). Thus, the best art, and especially literature, holds up moral models which we can attempt to emulate; it enables us to see ourselves, other people, and society in different ways and from different perspectives. It affirms and helps us see the interconnectedness and oneness of all living things.

The late John Gardner, arguing after Tolstoy, contends that literature should affirm the rising rhythms of life:

> True art, by specific technical means now commonly forgotten, clarifies life, establishes models of human action, casts nets toward the future, carefully judges our right and wrong directions, celebrates and mourns. It does not rant. It does not sneer or giggle in the face of death, it invents prayers and weapons. (Gardner, 1978, p. 100)

Helping us see more clearly, helping us affirm the goodness in life, helping us hold off the chaos and potential meaninglessness of life by giving us prayers and spiritual weapons, and helping us vigorously assert our faith in the future are all interrelated purposes of literature.

Today most teachers, especially those familiar with the work of teachers and scholars like Arbuthnot (1971), Huck (1979), and Norton (1983), understand the potential power of children's literature to "establish models of human action," to affirm the rising rhythms of life, and to foster in children the kind of understanding of self in relation to others that is so simply, yet eloquently, stated by Charlotte the spider. Indeed, most elementary teachers I know and with whom I work assert vigorously the importance of literature throughout the whole curriculum. They maintain that it is only through such an incorporation of literature into the subject matter areas that children begin to understand how science and history, for example, are meaningful moral enterprises which should promote the human welfare.

Literature does not offer the only models for children, however. Kids are surrounded, and often buffeted, by other models of behavior. These models, many of which are potentially non-productive or even dangerous, can be seen on television and at the movies. Other more "positive" models of behavior are often deliberately thrust upon kids by well-meaning parents,

teachers, clergy, and other adults. Exhortation, however, as Kohlberg (1981) has shown us, has little effect upon children's moral development. Rather, it is through the exploration of moral problems and through the adoption, for a while at least, of the perspectives of others that children begin to develop and refine their own morality. And it is precisely here that children's literature can serve such an invaluable role.

In the rest of this article I explore the relationships between children's literature and moral development. First, I discuss some of the characteristics of a "female morality" and why I think such a perspective on morality is important. Second, I describe some children's books which I believe exemplify this feminine perspective on morality. Third, I offer some suggestions for using these and other books in the classroom in an attempt to help kids develop not only cognitively, emotionally, and socially, but also morally.

In a Feminine Voice

> I saw the women of the earth coming toward each other
> with praise and heat
> without reservations of space,
> All shining and alight in solidarity.
> (LeSueur, 1975, p. 54)

Through her research and in her landmark book, In a Different Voice, Carol Gilligan (1982) has outlined for us two different conceptions of self, thought, and morality. The first perspective of morality is what Gilligan calls the "male," and

this morality is best exemplified in the work and theoretical constructs of researchers and authors like Kohlberg (1981) and Rawls (1971). This male morality, says Gilligan, is based on separation, on the ability to distance oneself from concrete situations in order to determine objectively just rules for mediating relationships. This male morality results in moral imperatives, moral judgments, rights, rules, and hierarchies of values. The emphasis is upon a reciprocity among people which allows each individual in society to develop as an individual. This is the conception of morality which has dominated most Western thinking. It is the conception of morality which has had the greatest impact upon contemporary education in general and reading education in particular. (See, for example, Hoskisson and Biskin, 1979; Readence, Moore, and Moore, 1982; Stahl-Gemake and Wielan, 1984.)

Gilligan also describes a second perspective of morality, one which she calls the "female." This morality, instead of being based on separation, is rooted in specific connections among people in specific contextual situations; it is grounded in networks of relationships where care and responsibility are of utmost importance. This female morality does not result in moral judgments and hierarchies of values, but instead results in a moral concern for the pain and suffering of others and in a recognition of one's responsibility to others. The emphasis is upon dialogue and response which allow individuals to solve conflicts in a nonviolent manner.

This female morality, says Gilligan, has either been ignored until very recently or has been perceived as being inadequate or less fully developed than male morality. According to Kohlberg's schema, for example, and the hypothetical moral dilemmas upon which the schema is based, girls and women are not as morally "developed" as boys and men. The moral reasoning of girls and women usually places them in the middle stages of Kohlberg's schema; they often fail to attain the "higher" stages of moral reasoning which are based upon social utilitarianism and abstract universal principles.

Gilligan takes great care to stress the fact that while male morality is not necessarily a characteristic of the male sex and female morality is not necessarily a characteristic of the female sex, in our society they do indeed tend to be sex-related. In her research and in the longitudinal research of people like Kohlberg (1981), boys and men generally exhibit a "male" morality and girls and women a "female" morality. Gilligan also points out that these two moralities are not opposits or sequential; one is not necessarily "better" than the other. Rather, she continues, they are complementary. Gilligan argues persuasively and elegantly for a psychology of morality and love which combines the two, which encompasses both knowledge and feelings, for "a language that conveys a different way of imagining the self in relation to others" (Gilligan, 1984, p. 91).

The importance of the female conception of self and morality which is based on care and concern, relationships, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution is becoming obvious to teachers, scholars, authors, and people from all walks of life. In our chaotic world where we dance crazily on the brink of nuclear destruction, violence, or the threat of violence, seems to hold sway. Erik Erikson, cited in Van Gelder (1984, p. 101), says that this threat of destruction has brought male leadership close to "the limits of its adaptive imagination." Thus, we need a different way of perceiving ourselves in relation to one another and to our environment; we need a new way of perceiving our nation in relation to other nations of the world. We need new metaphors and new ways of talking about conflicts, morality, and justice. The female morality as described by Gilligan, with its emphasis upon care and response rather than upon the fair weighing of claims (Gilligan 1984) seems to give us this new lanague and different perspective. Speaking from a theologian's viewpoint, Rosemary Ruether observes: "Feminism particularly upholds a model of relationship that stresses mutuality, rather than domination or subjugation" (Ruether, 1984, p. 18). This model becomes relevant when we extend it to our relationships with one another and to other peoples of the world.

Charlotte's Web of Care and Concern

In Charlotte's Web the interrelatedness of all life and the specific concerns and connections that bind us together as social beings are symbolically represented by Charlotte's web. Her web is used to trap flies to their deaths--deaths from which new spider lives will emerge. This is part of the natural order of things. (A natural order of death and life that Wilbur the pig only squeamishly, reluctantly, accepts.) However, Charlotte transforms her web into something beyond the natural order when she uses it to save Wilbur's life. By using her web in this manner, Charlotte enters into the social realm; her web becomes a thing of moral beauty, a network of spun strands connecting her life with that of another creature. When Charlotte carefully spins "TERRIFIC" in order to save Wilbur from the butcher's knife, we can see in action the kind of "true" moral art that Gardner (1978) describes: art that "casts nets toward the future" and "invents prayers and weapons" in the face of death.

Charlotte embodies the kind of feminine morality that Gilligan describes, and this is a difficult morality for Wilbur to comprehend. As Charlotte is dying, Wilbur asks her, "Why did you do all this for me? . . . I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you." Wilbur's sense of morality is based on a sense of reciprocity by which one weighs one's moral responsibilities only in relation to the actions and

responsibilities of others (and, as such, represents a lower stage of development in Kohlberg's hierarchy). Charlotte replies that she helped Wilbur because he is her friend. "That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you" (White, 1952, p. 164). In Charlotte's response, we see a morality that is qualitatively different from Wilbur's; we see a morality grounded in a specific relationship and in a concern for the pain and suffering of another.

The same kind of concern and connection is seen in The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses (Goble, 1978). Whereas Charlotte's web of moral care connects the insect world with that of the mammal, the Indian girl's network of love and concern connects the human with the non-human, through what Eiseley calls "the expression of love projected beyond the species boundary by a creature born of Darwinian struggle . . . . " (Eiseley, pp. 144-45). The girl's specific love for both her own tribe and the Horse People and her unwillingness to sacrifice one group for the other results in nonviolent conflict resolution of the highest order. In the beautiful "marriage" scene where the wild horses come down into the village and celebrate with the tribe, we see a morality that connects all living things together: "Everyone was joyful." We are left with a union between the human and non-human that enlarges us and makes us more human to the extent that we are able to include the animal world in our circle of care:

> Today we are still glad to remember that we have relatives among the Horse People. And it gives us joy to see the wild horses running free. Our thoughts fly with them. (Goble, 1978, unpaginated)

If we look at fairy tales from within the context of Gilligan's psychology of morality and love and its attendant non-violent conflict resolution, then certain fairy tale endings become more understandable and less forced. Bettelheim (1976) contends that the harsh, often-times cruel, punishment that "evil" characters receive at the end of fairy tales is something that the child's sense of morality demands. He is disdainful of fairy tale endings which soften the evil characters' "just rewards." Thus, those versions of Cinderella in which the step-sisters are rewarded for their wickedness and falseness by having their eyes plucked out by birds would seem to better fit Bettelheim's conception of the child's morality than those versions in which Cinderella forgives her sisters and marries them off to handsome young princes. Bettelheim says:

> It does not seem fitting to the child that Cinderella's evil sisters should go scot-free, or even be elevated by Cinderella. Such magnanimity does not impress the child favorably, nor will he learn it from a parent who bowdlerizes the story so that just and the wicked are both rewarded. . . The child feels that all's well with the world, and that he can be secure in it, only if the wicked are punished in the end. (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 147

But does the child's sense of justice and morality demand this kind of an "eye for an eye" resolution? Can the child feel secure in the world only if the evil are punished? Even if the

child's unconscious requires such harsh resolutions (and ths is not the place to examine, Bettelheim's at times strained neo-Freudian analysis of fairy tales), can we not also offer alternative models and ways of perceiving and interacting with the world? I think at the very least we can show children that a moralilty which separates and isolates the "evil-doers" offers little or no chance for reconciliation, for re-establishing the broken network of mutuality.

Bettelheim perceives the child's sense of justice as basically a lower-level Kohlbergian one; it deals with competing rights and the weighing of individual claims for rewards and punishments. But this morality of isolation is only one way of structuring the world; we do not have to accept it or propagate it. Ironically, it is also the same kind of morality espoused by various feminist critics of fairy tales who argue that the "reading of fairy tales is one of the first steps in the maintenance of a misogynous, sex role stereotyped patriarchy..." (Waelti-Walters, 1982, pp. 1-2). Rather than offering the healing mutuality of Gilligan's morality, feminist critics often carry the male morality of competing rights, rules, and separation to an extreme:

> The struggle to refuse all such training, models and approval, to take responsibility for your own life and step resolutely out of the prison of a prolonged childhood into a hostile environment in which you have no guaranteed place is a hard one indeed . . . . (Waelti-Walters, 1982, p. 12)

This kind of Existentialist angst and isolation does not lead, I believe, to a more caring and compassionate world in which both males and females develop a more comprehensive morality. Instead, it merely perpetuates the present focus on social power, and not cooperation. It helps to perpetuate the very thing it abhors.

We have seen that through their actions Charlotte, the Indian girl who loved horses, and Cinderella all reject a morality based on rights, rules, and separation. This understanding that there is much more to life than survival in a "hostile environment" is also seen in Island of the Blue Dolphins (O'Dell, 1960). The Indian girl, Karana, stranded alone on an island, hunts with a vengeance the wild dogs that killed her brother. When she wounds the leader of the dog pack, however, she finds that she cannot kill him. She makes the same kind of connection with the non-human world that the Indian girl makes in The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses: she enlarges her circle of care and compassion to include the wild dogs. It is through this action that she redeems both herself and the wild dogs; her love establishes a network where before only existed separation, revenge, and hatred. Furthermore, it is through her creative act of naming the dog leader that she constructs both a new, viable self and a social relationship:

> Because of this I was not lonely. I did not know how lonely I had been until I had Rontu to talk to. (O'Dell, 1960, p. 101)

We see this morality of interconnectedness most clearly, I believe, in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor, 1976). The Logan family, Blacks living in the South during the Depression years, resists the hatred and injustice heaped upon them and the Black community by racist whites through courage and perserverance. Mama Logan epitomizes the strength, dignity, and heroism of a morality grounded in concern, compassion, and connection. She actively and nonviolently resists injustice and evil--she is no mere passive resister (in the pejorative sense of that work)--by extending her concern beyond her immediate family. She risks her job and personal well-being by struggling for the rights of her people. However, it is important to stress that she rejects the kind of readily-available violent solutions to problems advocated by the males of her extended family. She realizes that we can only affirm our own humanity by affirming it for all people--even those we dislike or who hate us. When Mama Logan's daughter, Cassie, says, "Ah, shoot! White ain't nothing'," Mama affirms:

> It is something, Cassie. White is something just like black is something. Everybody born on this earth is something and nobody, no matter what color, is better anybody else. (Taylor, 1976, pp. 95-96)

This kind of morality extends mutuality and respect; it does not separate and exclude. It attempts to build bridges over the chasms of hatred. It does so fearlessly and with conviction.

Mama Logan, risking her own job and safety by organizing a boycott against an exploitive and cruel white store owner, epitomizes Gilligan's psychology of love and morality in action. She expands her circle of concern to include not only her own immediate family, but also the welfare of her community.

Fostering Moral Development in the Classroom

The purpose of literature is always first and foremost to delight. Reading a story, poem, or play should always be an end in itself for children. As Rosenblatt (1978) convincingly argues, experiencing literature is a personal transaction in which a reader creates a living thing, a poem. While acknowledging the fact that literature is an end in itself, we must also acknowledge that it can also be a means. "Children can learn to read and write through literature, extending their listening and speaking skills at the same time" (Galda and Pillar, 1983, p. 39). Literature can also be a means for fostering moral development in the classroom.

We must always be on guard to avoid turning literature as a means into an end in itself. Using children's literature in a crudely didactic fashion is dangerous. Such moral didacticism can be harmful to children's developing love of books and developing sense of moral interdependence. Likewise, such didacticism is harmful to the teacher because it puts her into

the position of moral arbiter and inculcator--indeed, often into the role of moral propagandist.

With these reservations in mind, there are things that we can do in the classroom to foster children's exploration of morality from a more comprehensive perspective, or from what Gilligan calls a psychology of love and morality based on imagery of relationships and connections.

First, we can regularly use with children books which offer an alternative to the usual male or Kohlbergian perspective on morality. (We will use others too, of course. I'm not advocating lists of "approved" books here.) We can select books which not only explore and affirm a morality based on care, responsibility, and connections within specific contextual situations, but also offer strong, admirable role models who embody this kind of morality. The books I've discussed are a beginning, but there are others. Mamie Trotter in The Great Gilly Hopkins (Paterson, 1978); Meg in A Wrinkle in Time (L'Engle, 1962) and A Wind in the Door (L'Engle, 1973); Zlateh the goat and Aaron the boy in "Zlateh the Goat," (Singer, 1984); Dorothy and her fellow travelers in The Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1958); and, of course, Beauty in Beauty and the Beast (Pearce, 1972) all come to mind.

Second, we can help children compare alternative endings to certain traditional tales, for example, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Three Little Pigs, and Little Red Riding Hood. We can

help them explore and articulate why they think one ending is "better" than another, e.g. Cinderella's step-sisters getting married instead of having their eyes plucked out. We don't want to force children into accepting a "correct" ending here, but we do want children to think and talk about different ways of resolving problems and of interacting with other people. Of course this requires tact, sensitivity, openness, and a delicacy of touch on the part of the teacher.

Third, we can have children act (Piaget, 1952) on their reading by trying out possible alternative ways of interpreting or "re-visioning" a book, scene, situation, or character. Children can role play different parts and then discuss why or why not a particular moral solution to a problem was "just." For example, we can have children pretend that they are one of Cinderella's step-sisters. We can have them think about why they treated Cinderella the way they did. What do they think Cinderella and her prince should now do to them? Or we can have children re-write the scene in Island of the Blue Dolphins (O'Dell, 1960) in which Karana spares the wild dog leader's life. We can ask children to speculate what would happen to Karana if she killed the dog? Any activity which requires children to re-vision the author's work through creative dramatics, writing, art, and oral performance can help children begin to explore alternative ways of perceiving reality and morality.

This exploration is necessary in order for children to

develop a more comprehensive morality of concern and care for others. By entering into the lives of characters and by recasting those lives in alternative ways, children are able to take on the perspectives of other people. And out of such ability to imagine and understand different perspectives is the compassionate adult formed.

Fourth, and lastly, we can share with children real-life role models who manifest in their lives the kind of comprehensive morality I have been exploring. Biographies are excellent for this purpose. Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior (Clayton, 1968); Rosa Parks (Greenfield, 1973); I Will be Heard; The Life of William Lloyd Garrison (Faber, 1970); The Story of Johnny Appleseed (Aliki, 1964); and Journey toward Freedom; The Story of Sojourner Truth (Bernard, 1967) are some first-rate biographies that come to mind. Films and recordings, for example, of Martin Luther King, Jr., can be used in conjunction with these biographies in order to extend and deepen the children's understanding of these individuals.

Conclusion

After Dorothy first meets the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz and he agrees to accompany her to the Emerald City, he says to her, "If anyone treads on my toes or sticks a pin into me, it doesn't matter, for I can't feel it. But I do not want people to call me a fool, and if my head stays stuffed with straw instead of brains, as yours is, how am I ever to know anything?" (Baum, 1958, p. 19) Dorothy responds simply, but compassionately. "'I understand how you feel,' said the little girl, who was truly sorry for him. 'If you will come with me I'll ask Oz to do all he can for you.'" (Baum, 1958, p.19)

This is the essence of a morality grounded in care, concern for the pain and suffering of others, and in a recognition of one's responsibility to others; this is the essence of a morality of connections and interrelatedness. However, while such understanding is necessary, it is not sufficient. One must act on this understanding, and that is precisely what Dorothy does.

This one scene and the subsequent events that make manifest Dorothy's care for the Scarecrow bring moral concerns and our responsibility to our fellow beings alive in a simple yet resonant manner. Literature allows children and the teacher together to explore morality in an honest and meaningful way. Once again, as Gardner says, literature "clarifies life, establishes models of human action, casts nets toward the future,

carefully judges our right and wrong directions . . . (Gardner, 1978, p. 100). And this kind of moral exploration and teaching is dramatically different in kind from, say, the exploration of Kohlberg's moral dilemmas. Exploration of moral dilemmas and value clarification-type situations tends to lead to moral abstractions and principles. Living through the characters of books tends to lead to the love and specific connections between Charlotte and Wilbur, Karana and Rontu, and Dorothy and the Scarecrow. By becoming these characters, children learn a morality of flesh and bone and not one of vague principles.

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